

THEORY AND THE COMMON
FROM MARX TO BADIOU

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Patrick McGee

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FOREWORD

As a work in progress, the title of this book was “The Importance of Being Common,” with two possible subtitles: either “Theory from the Underground” or “A Personal Journey through Theory.” These titles suggest the book’s hybridity as a work of critical thought and an intellectual memoir. Some readers may question the personal and even eccentric approach to the history of theory and the thought of common sense that this book lays out in a nonchronological order. For myself, I must confess that theory has always been a very personal thing. I came to it because I found answers—however provisional and hypothetical—to questions life imposed on me without my consent. There has never been anything neutral about my relation to theory, which has led me to question the significance of particular interests, including my own. I wrote this book for anyone who cares to read about theory from the perspective of someone who is not a master. I wrote it especially for academics and students who feel sometimes that the whole game of academic discourse is a masquerade that hides the one thing you really want to say. I’m not calling for an end to the masquerade. I only want the recognition that the truth may not be the face behind the mask but the mask behind the face.

I want to thank Evander Lomke at Continuum Press for his encouragement at a critical moment in the history of this project. Most of all, I thank Palgrave Macmillan and my original editor, Farideh Koochi-Kamali, for taking the risk of sending the manuscript to a reader. Brigitte Shull, my final editor, has been extremely patient and helpful throughout the process. I thank Enda Duffy, who was my anonymous reader, for the best review of a manuscript I have received in my career. I am indebted to John Pizer for checking my paraphrases of particular passages from German texts. My conversations with Mustapha Marrouchi during the period I was writing strongly influenced this work. I owe special thanks to Dr. David Hayes for his friendship and guidance. I also enjoyed the strong support of my friend Tim Paulson, my wife Joan, and my son Sean. I dedicate this book to my students whose skepticism, wit, and independence of mind inspired

me to discover my intellectual voice. To my father, I can only repeat the last two lines of a poem by James Joyce: “O, father forsaken, / Forgive your son!”